



Written Submission to the Department of Finance

Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2025 Budget

**Brain Research: The cornerstone for Canada's
future social-economic wealth**

March 10, 2025

By: Canadian Brain Research Strategy

<https://canadianbrain.ca/>



The Canadian Brain Research Strategy and its broad network of stakeholders recommends the following:

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada make research on the brain and mental health a national priority with stable, targeted funding for the creation of a Canadian Brain Research Initiative by investing \$150 million over 3 years, and a dedicated, sustained commitment to fund this priority to improve health outcomes and quality of life for people in Canada.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1 in 5 people—7.5 million Canadians—live with a brain condition, making brain disorders the leading cause of disability in the country¹. Whether it's mental illness, autism, substance use disorders, brain injuries, or dementia, the burden is growing. It's disrupting lives and affecting families, straining healthcare, and undermining our workforce and productivity.
- Canada boasts leading experts in multiple fields of neuroscience and mental health research, and possesses the largest proportion of neuroscience specialists among G7 countries². Breakthroughs for conditions like Alzheimer's, depression, and stroke are within reach. National coordination is needed to turn isolated discoveries into solutions that benefit all Canadians.
- The global economy is increasingly brain-based. Half of the top emerging job skills—such as analytical thinking and creativity—depend on brain health³. Yet, brain research remains underfunded and fragmented, and brain health across the lifespan is not a national priority. Investing in brain health is essential to workforce resilience, economic competitiveness, and innovation⁴. This is especially true in Canada, which has the largest working-age population in the G7⁵ but lags in productivity growth.
- The Canadian Brain Research Strategy (CBRS) unites neuroscience and mental health researchers, clinicians, Indigenous Knowledge Holders, patients, health charities, private and public science funders, and industry into a unified brain research ecosystem⁶⁻²². Together, we have created a clear vision to bring together and build a functional and impactful ecosystem to enhance social, health, and economic outcomes in Canada and beyond. Realizing this vision requires stable, targeted investment in brain research.
- An investment of \$50 million annually over 3 years in a Canadian Brain Research Initiative is a small fraction of the tens of billions in economic burden each year from brain conditions^{1,22-25}. It is the critical next step to connect the research excellence, infrastructure, and partnerships we already have—turning cutting-edge discoveries into real-world progress—advancing solutions that help prevent, maintain, and optimize brain health for all Canadians.

The coalition convened by the CBRS believes that the time for a national initiative is now. We have the network, partnerships, vision, and strategic plan in place. There is a need for a coordinated approach on brain research, and the talent and infrastructure to support it. We now need the funding in the amount of \$150 million to catalyze this network into concerted, bold, and concrete action.

THE VISION FOR A CANADIAN BRAIN RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Brain conditions—whether neurological, psychiatric, neurodevelopmental, or injury-related—are often treated separately, yet they share common underlying mechanisms and interrelated disease pathways. Advancing brain health requires a coordinated national approach that leverages these connections, integrates expertise across disciplines, and sustains research beyond individual projects⁶⁻²².

Recognizing this need, CBRS has brought together a brain strategy coalition with the directors of 40 of Canada’s neuroscience and mental health institutes and programs across the country, along with clinicians, early career researchers, Indigenous Knowledges Holders, people with lived experience of brain conditions, research funders, health charities, non-profits, private foundations, industry partners, professional societies, and knowledge mobilization groups. Through a consensus-driven process, the coalition has developed a unifying framework for the Canadian Brain Research Initiative (CBRI), a homegrown strategy to build on Canada’s strengths in collaboration, transdisciplinary research, and open science. CBRI is designed to maximize the impact of existing investments in research training, platforms, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. To drive real progress in brain health, Canada needs a stable, long-term national commitment that provides the resources and support necessary for discovery and innovation.

The Future of Brain Research Is Coming Together

We are united behind a brain and mental health research strategy for all Canadians.

The collage includes logos from the following organizations and institutions:

- Universities:** University of Toronto, Western University, Lakehead University, Memorial University, Université Laval, Université de Moncton, Université de Guelph, University of Saskatchewan, University of Alberta, University of Lethbridge, University of Manitoba, University of Regina, University of Waterloo, York University, Carleton University, Dalhousie University, McGill University, Simon Fraser University (SFU), University of Ottawa, University of British Columbia (UBC), University of Alberta, University of Saskatchewan, University of Lethbridge, University of Manitoba, University of Regina, University of Waterloo, York University, Carleton University, Dalhousie University, McGill University, Simon Fraser University (SFU).
- Research Institutes & Centers:** Centre for Brain Research, Centre for Neuroimaging, Centre for Cognitive Neuroscience, Centre for Mental Health, Centre for Brain Health, Centre for Neuroimaging, Centre for Cognitive Neuroscience, Centre for Mental Health, Centre for Brain Health, Centre for Neuroimaging, Centre for Cognitive Neuroscience, Centre for Mental Health, Centre for Brain Health.
- Foundations & Charities:** Alzheimer Society, Parkinson Canada, SICKKids, Family Wellness, Weston Family Foundation, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Brain Research Strategy, Canadian Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience, Krembil Foundation, Canadian Centre for Brain Health, Canadian Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience, Krembil Foundation.
- Other Organizations:** Baycrest, CTRN, CTRC, CIFAR, IVADO, Hydrocephalus Canada, CCNA, CCNV, Roche, CNS RCPs, CERN, VISTA CEREB, Connected Minds CFRE, KREMIL FOUNDATION, HUNTINGTON, WOMEN'S BRAIN HEALTH INITIATIVE, CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY, CIHR IRSC, RECHERCHE MENTALE CANADA, ONTARIO BRAIN INSTITUTE, PRAXIS, HEART & STROKE, CANADIAN CONCUSSION NETWORK, RECHERCHE CANADIENNE EN NEUROLOGIE, HUNTINGTON, WOMEN'S BRAIN HEALTH INITIATIVE, CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY, CIHR IRSC, RECHERCHE MENTALE CANADA, ONTARIO BRAIN INSTITUTE, PRAXIS, HEART & STROKE, CANADIAN CONCUSSION NETWORK, RECHERCHE CANADIENNE EN NEUROLOGIE.



BRAIN HEALTH IS CANADA'S NEXT BIG CHALLENGE—AND OPPORTUNITY

Brain health is fundamental to Canada's well-being and economic future. A healthy brain enables people to think, contribute, and excel in the workforce and society.

Yet, 1 in 5 people—7.5 million Canadians—live with a brain condition, making it the leading cause of disability in the country¹, whether it's due to mental illness, autism, substance use disorders, brain injuries, and/or dementia. With an aging population²⁶ and the lingering neurological and mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic²⁷, the number of Canadians affected by brain conditions is only expected to rise.

The economic impact of brain disorders is already staggering, costing the Canadian economy tens of billions of dollars annually in direct medical healthcare costs, lost productivity, social care expenses, income support, private insurance claims, and public disability payments^{1,22–28}. But the human cost is even greater. Brain conditions disrupt thinking, emotional well-being, and quality of life, often affecting people in their most productive years. Families face lifelong caregiving responsibilities, and many individuals struggle to remain in school or the workforce²⁹. The burden is lasting, as many brain conditions persist over a lifetime, limiting opportunities, independence, and participation in society.

Beyond reducing disease burden, investing in brain health presents a major opportunity for Canada's future prosperity. The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report³ found that half of the top emerging job skills—such as analytical thinking and creativity—are brain-related. Research from the McKinsey Health Institute suggests that improving brain health could increase global GDP by up to 12%³⁰. At Davos 2025, brain health was recognized as a priority for policymakers and business leaders, reinforcing its importance beyond healthcare as a driver of innovation and economic growth⁴.

Recognizing the power of targeted national investment, Canada has strategically committed hundreds of millions to billions of dollars to AI, quantum technologies, and biomanufacturing as pillars of its innovation strategy. These investments reflect a commitment to large-scale coordination that advances research and strengthens economic growth. Yet, brain research—despite its comparable potential to transform health, industry, and the workforce—has yet to receive the same level of strategic investment.

Canada is at a turning point. Policymakers can no longer afford to overlook brain health as a strategic asset. More than fifteen years ago, the Hon. Michael Wilson, P.C., C.C., former Minister of Finance, recognized the critical role of brain health and cognitive skills in economic success³¹.



His work introduced the concept of brain capital—the combined power of brain health and brain skills that fuel productivity, innovation, and adaptability. Just as past economies relied on muscle power and natural resources, the future economy will depend on investing in brain power to sustain Canada’s global competitiveness.

CANADA’S BRAIN ADVANTAGE FOR A THRIVING ECONOMY

Brain power is Canada’s greatest asset. We have world-class brain researchers, a highly skilled talent pool, and the largest working-age population in the G7. Yet, without strategic national investment, we are failing to turn this strength into innovation, productivity and economic growth.

Canada’s global excellence in brain and mental health research spans major research hubs and smaller institutions, creating a rich and diverse research landscape³². Understanding and addressing brain health requires a comprehensive, transdisciplinary approach across the lifespan, and Canada has the expertise across diverse research areas to tackle this immensely complex challenge. However, without a coordinating national initiative and dedicated long-term funding, we are failing to fully harness this collective strength.

Major global players—including the United States³³, European Union³⁴, Japan³⁵, China³⁶, and South Korea³⁷—have invested hundreds of millions to billions of dollars in large-scale brain research initiatives. Despite decades of underinvestment in research, Canadian scientists have remained internationally competitive, for example, securing over \$40 million annually from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH)—estimated to be closer to \$100 million when including subawards³⁸. While this demonstrates the excellence of Canadian researchers, recent uncertainty in U.S. science funding has also exposed Canada’s vulnerability.

Budget 2024 made historic investments in research, but Canada is still catching up. For the past 20 years, Canada has invested less in R&D as a percentage of GDP than most G7 peers³⁹, limiting our ability to scale national research efforts. The issue isn’t just a funding gap—our current system does not support long-term research capacity. Grants are too small to sustain research personnel, shared infrastructure, and large-scale innovation. As a result, Canada trains world-class scientists but struggles to retain them: 64% of graduate students plan to leave the country, citing a lack of jobs and job stability⁴⁰.

With the right investment, we can leverage this strong pipeline of highly trained researchers eager to contribute. The Canadian Brain Research Initiative (CBRI) is a strategic investment in Canada’s existing strengths. It provides long-term, stable, and flexible funding to support highly qualified personnel (HQP), national research platforms, and shared infrastructure. This will not



only advance discoveries in brain science but also build a strong nationwide highly skilled technical workforce that advances brain research and drives innovation across multiple sectors.

But retaining talent alone is not enough—Canada must also maximize the potential of its entire workforce. Canada has one of the most highly educated populations in the world and the largest working-age population in the G7, with 67.5% of Canadians in their prime working years⁵. This should be a major economic advantage, yet Canada lags in productivity growth. A productive, resilient, and innovative workforce depends on brain health. Cognitive function, mental well-being, and neurological stability are essential for learning, problem-solving, and sustaining a competitive workforce. However, millions of Canadians are already affected by neurological and mental health conditions that limit their ability to work.

Without strategic investment in brain research, Canada is failing to harness its strongest economic asset—its people. By accelerating research and advancing lifespan brain health, CBRI supports a stronger, healthier, and more innovative workforce—driving long-term economic growth and competitiveness.

THE URGENCY TO INVEST IN CANADA'S BRAIN FUTURE

Breakthroughs are within reach—and other countries are moving fast. Canada must invest now or risk being left behind.

Brain health is no longer just a healthcare issue—it is a workforce, economic, and productivity issue. In 2011, the Hon. Michael Wilson estimated that 85% of new jobs would require cognitive skills³¹. His report also warned that brain disorders would become the leading cause of disability. That moment has arrived. Despite his warning, Canada has not kept pace with the investments needed to protect brain health and advance brain research.

Meanwhile, the field has moved forward. Driven by major national brain research initiatives worldwide, we are seeing breakthroughs in previously untreatable conditions—such as Alzheimer's, depression, ALS, and others—within reach. Canadian researchers are at the forefront of many of these advances, but without long-term, stable funding and coordination, we risk failing to leverage these breakthroughs into solutions that meet Canada's needs and help grow our economy.

Brain health and research is also rapidly gaining momentum as a global policy priority. High-profile international initiatives have recognized its impact on economic growth, workforce resilience, and innovation. From the 2013 G8 Dementia Summit to Brain Days Science Summits



at the past three United Nations General Assembly meetings, governments and global organizations are making significant commitments to brain research and policy. (See Appendix for key international developments.)

With Canada's G7 presidency this year, we have a unique opportunity to lead on brain health globally⁴¹. Canada must act now, not just to take bold action at home but to ensure we are shaping the future of brain health, rather than relying on solutions developed elsewhere. Investing in lifespan brain health from childhood through aging and accelerating research to develop solutions before the crisis escalates will strengthen workforce cognitive resilience and sustain Canada's long-term economic growth and competitiveness.

THE MOMENT TO LEAD

A made-in-Canada solution already exists—what's missing is national leadership to carry it out. The Canadian Brain Research Initiative (CBRI) is ready to be implemented, providing a coordinating national framework to strengthen brain research, retain top talent, and drive innovation across the country. The House of Commons Finance Committee has already recognized the need for national investment in brain research⁴²:

Recommendation 131

Make research on the brain and mental health a national priority with stable, targeted funding for the creation of a Canadian brain research initiative, and a dedicated, sustained commitment to fund this priority to improve health outcomes and quality of life for people in Canada.

Budget 2025 is the moment to act.

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Appendix: Key International Developments in Brain Health and Research

These milestones reflect growing global recognition of brain health and science as central to health, economic resilience, and sustainable development—and highlight a trajectory that Canada is well-positioned to lead.

- **2025 – [Brain House at the World Economic Forum \(Davos, Switzerland\)](#)** – Global leaders across sectors gathered in recognition of brain health as a strategic priority for economic resilience, innovation, and population well-being to advance its integration into global policy and investment agendas⁴.
- **2025 – [International G7 Canada Brain Health Workshop \(London, Canada\)](#)** – An international gathering of 70+ neuroscience, public health, and policy experts to define brain health and develop a G7-level framework for global action.
- **2024 – [G7 Health Ministers’ Side Event: Prioritizing Brain Health – A Global Imperative for Public Health \(Ancona, Italy\)](#)** – Highlighted the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration in brain health, public awareness and communication on brain capital, and strategic integration of brain health into national economic agendas.
- **2024 – [Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas \(DPRIT\) \(Houston, USA\)](#)** – A \$3B legislative initiative announced to drive early-life dementia prevention, modeled after the successful Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) program.
- **2024 – [The Yaoundé Declaration on Brain Economy, Brain Health & Brain Capital \(Yaoundé, Cameroon\)](#)** – Issued following a high-level international convening and endorsed by the President of Cameroon, Chair of UNGA79, the declaration called for urgent global investment and inclusive leadership in brain health.
- **2022-2024 – [Brain Health and Research Events at the Science Summit @ UNGA \(New York, USA\)](#)** – A series of high-level international sessions advanced brain health and research in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and expanded global dialogue on brain capital, equity, and international collaboration.
- **2018 – [G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development \(Buenos Aires, Argentina\)](#)** – Recognized early brain development as key to economic growth and workforce resilience, encouraging investment in brain health, education, and early intervention.
- **2016 – [G-Science Academies Statement: Understanding, Protecting, and Developing Global Brain Resources \(Tokyo, Japan\)](#)** – Called for global collaboration on brain research, brain-based AI, and integrating neuroscience with education, health, and social policy.
- **2013 – [G8 Dementia Summit \(London, UK\)](#)** – Brought together governments, researchers, and industry to accelerate investment and innovation in dementia prevention, treatment, and care. The summit led to the creation of the Dementia Discovery Fund, a major international venture initiative supporting the development of new treatments.

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- ¹ Author's calculation using data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2020), available at <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/>
- ² Larivière et al. (2016). Bibliometric Analysis of INMHA-related Research, 2000-2015. Prepared for the CIHR Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction
- ³ World Economic Forum. (2025). Future of Jobs Report 2025: Jobs of the future and the skills you need to get them. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/future-of-jobs-report-2025-jobs-of-the-future-and-the-skills-you-need-to-get-them/>
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- ⁵ Statistics Canada. (2022). The Daily April 27th, 2022 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220427/dq220427a-eng.htm>
- ⁶ Illes et al. (2019). A Neuroethics Backbone for the Evolving Canadian Brain Research Strategy. Neuron. doi:[10.1016/j.neuron.2018.12.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2018.12.021)
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- ⁸ Neurological Health Charities Canada. (2021). A National Neurological Strategy for Canada <https://mybrainmatters.ca/wp-content/uploads/NationalNeurologicalStrategyEN-Aug2021.pdf>
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- ¹⁰ Brain Injury Canada. (2023). Brief for the Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on International Moonshot Programs <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR12164959/br-external/BrainInjuryCanada-e.pdf>
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- ¹² Canadian Concussion Network. (2023). Brief for the Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on International Moonshot Programs <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR12190773/br-external/CanadianConcussionNetwork-e.pdf>
- ¹³ Cancer Research Society. (2023). Brief for the Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on International Moonshot Programs <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR12174704/br-external/CancerResearchSociety-e.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Centre for Aging + Brain Health Innovation. (2023). Brief for the Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on International Moonshot Programs <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR12219789/br-external/CentreforAgingBrainHealthInnovation-e.pdf>
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¹⁸ Hydrocephalus Canada. (2023). Brief for the Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on International Moonshot Programs

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²⁰ Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. (2023). Brief for the Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on International Moonshot Programs

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR12174714/br-external/MultipleSclerosisSocietyofCanada-e.pdf>

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²⁴ Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms. (2020). Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Report. (2015–2017). <https://csuch.ca/resources/national/>

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²⁶ Statistics Canada. (2022). 2021 Census, The Daily Released: 2022-04-27

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²⁷ Mental Health Research Canada. (2022). Understanding the Mental Health of Canadians Throughout COVID-19 and Beyond: Poll #14 <https://www.mhrc.ca/findings-of-poll-14>

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²⁹ Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence. (2024). Caring in Canada: Survey insights from caregivers and care providers across Canada. <https://canadiancaregiving.org/caring-in-canada/>

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³² For specific examples and features on individual researchers, see <https://canadabrainpower.com/>

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- ³³ BRAIN Initiative. (2024). BRAIN Initiative: Scientific advancements 2025. National Institutes of Health. <https://braininitiative.nih.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BRAIN-Initiative-scientific-advancements-2025-508c.pdf>
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- ⁴¹ Eyre, H. A., Young, J. Z., et al. (2025). Canada 2025 G7 Brain Economy Summit: Call to action. https://canadianbrain.ca/G7_Brain_Economy
- ⁴² House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. (2024). Pre-budget consultations in advance of the 2024 budget (Report 21, 44th Parliament, 1st Session). <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/FINA/report-21/>